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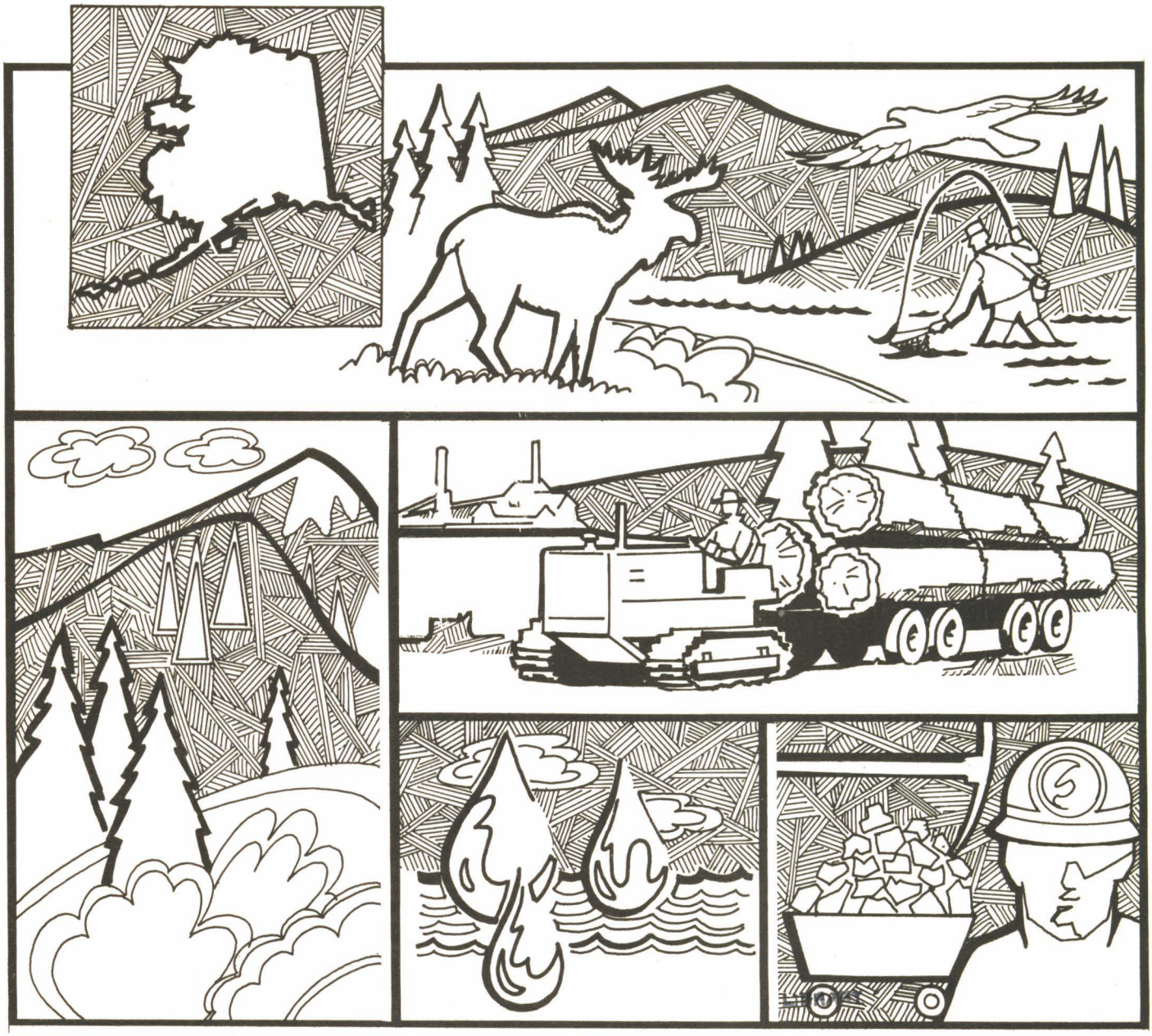
new national forests for alaska



FOREST SERVICE • U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
CURRENT INFORMATION REPORT NO. 12 • FEBRUARY 1974

MAR 8 1974
ROCKY MOUNTAIN STATION

NEW NATIONAL FORESTS FOR ALASKA
A PROGRESS REPORT

Background

Until Alaska became a State in 1959, its 375 million acres were held as public territory under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management of the U.S. Department of the Interior. Upon being granted statehood, Alaska was authorized to select 103.5 million acres of the territory for State ownership. In 8 years, the State selected about 25 million acres. Then, however, claims to the land by Alaska Natives, (Indians, Eskimos, and Aleuts), caused the Secretary of the Interior in 1967 to freeze all land grants pending settlement of the Native claims.

Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act

On December 18, 1971, Public Law 92-203, titled the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), was approved. ANCSA provided for settlement of Native claims by the creation of an Alaska Native Fund and by the formation of Regional and Village Corporations which may select lands within areas withdrawn for that purpose by the Secretary of the Interior.

In addition to Native land selections, ANCSA provided for a Joint Federal/State Land Use Planning Commission for Alaska. The Commission has broad advisory powers in land use planning and recommendations on Village and Regional selections. It also has a say on areas best suited for permenent reservation in Federal ownership.

The Act also empowered the Secretary of the Interior to withdraw lands to insure that the "public interest" was properly protected; and to withdraw up to, but not exceed 80 million acres suitable for "addition to or creation as units of the National Park, Forest, Wildlife Refuge, and Wild and Scenic Rivers Systems..." from which he would recommend to the Congress permanent additions to these systems.

Forest Service Study

To assist in the review of the public lands in Alaska and to help propose areas for consideration as new National Forests, the Forest Service in April 1972, assembled a small study team composed of members from both its Alaska Region and from Multiple Use Planning Staffs elsewhere. The Forest Service study was directed toward the 127 million acres withdrawn in March 1973, by Secretary Morton as public interest and national conservation system lands.

In studying these withdrawn lands, the general criteria applied to lands considered suitable for inclusion in the National Forest System were that the particular areas identified have nationally significant values that should be retained in public ownership to assure

permanency of protection and continuity of management, and that the resources offer a balance of uses that would be better managed under multiple use principles than under dominant or limited use. In addition, it was deemed necessary that the areas be in manageable units such as those delineated by drainages, ecological relationships, or existing or proposed transportation systems.

After areas which met these criteria were selected, they were analyzed for the following:

1. Physiographic features--soils, drainage, vegetation, and accessibility.

2. Resource inventory--both renewable and non-renewable.

3. Socio-economic situation--including the existing management and the feasibility of the unit for management.

4. Management alternatives--the advantages and disadvantages of each alternative were tested against the planning objectives, as expressed in the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. These objectives provide for:

   - Environmental conservation;

   - Community, industry, and user stability and growth;

   - Regional development;

   - Coordinated planning between Federal, State, and Natives;

   - Protection of public values;

   - Determination of management, land use and ownership distribution;

   - Identification and protection of public access needs.

Study Team Findings

The Forest Service Study Team finished a preliminary analysis in 1972 of the lands considered best suited for multiple use management and in July 1973 recommended the lands that it concluded should be considered for addition to the National Forest System. The Study Team found 39.4 million acres in seven areas suitable for new units in the National Forest System and 2.6 million acres for additions to the present Tongass and Chugach National Forests (Table 1).

Table 1.-Areas found suitable for addition to the National Forest System

Unit	Public Interest lands	Conservation system lands	Pipeline Corridor	Total
	Million acres			
Wrangell Mountain National Forest	2.6	8.8		11.4
Fortymile National Forest	3.2	1.6		4.8
Porcupine National Forest	0.4	5.1		5.5
Lake Clark National Forest	0.5	3.2		3.7
Kuskokwim National Forest	3.6			3.6
Yukon National Forest	3.4	4.3		7.7
Koyukuk National Forest	0.9	0.9	0.9	2.7
Subtotal	14.6	23.9	0.9	39.4
Extensions to Tongass/ Chugach National Forests	1.2	1.4		2.6
Total.....	15.8	25.3	0.9	42.0

Activities of Other Agencies

In addition to the Forest Service's Alaska Planning Team of five men, the Department of the Interior's National Park Service, Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, and Bureau of Outdoor Recreation had study teams in the field.

The National Park Service directed its efforts toward areas of outstanding scenic or scientific interest. The Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife keyed in on important waterfowl- and seabird-nesting, feeding and staging areas as well as on certain major big game herd units. The Bureau of Outdoor Recreation reviewed the rivers of Alaska for their wild and scenic characteristics.

It is quite clear that there are lands in Alaska suitable for inclusion in all of the four conservation systems. But inevitably areas considered suitable by one study team often overlapped those thought suitable by another.

The Secretary's Decision

The Secretary of the Interior reviewed the studies submitted by the four conservation agencies (National Park Service, Forest Service, Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, and the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation). He also received recommendations from the Federal/State Land Use Planning Commission for Alaska as well as such agencies as the Bureau of Mines and the Geological Survey. These studies and recommendations provided the information for the Secretary's final recommendations.

Current Situation

On December 18, 1973, the Secretary of the Interior announced his recommendations and sent to Congress proposed legislation for the four Federal systems in Alaska. Included were recommendations for three major new National Forests, totaling 18.3 million acres, and 500,000 acres of additions to the Chugach National Forest; 32.3 million acres of National Parks; and 31.6 million acres of National Wildlife Refuges. He also recommended adding 20 new units to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, 16 of which lie within the boundaries of proposed National Parks, Refuges, and Forests.

The Secretary's specific proposals are listed in Table 2.

National Forest System Proposals

Following are brief descriptions of the areas proposed for addition to the National Forest System:

Porcupine National Forest. Derives its name from the Porcupine River. Covers 5.5 million acres in East Central Alaska adjoining the Canadian border and not far south of the Alaska National Wildlife Range. It consists largely of broad river flats and low-lying hills,with many lakes and waterways; the northern half is above the Arctic Circle. The area is 70-percent forested, with 750 million board feet of commercially valuable sawtimber.

Table 2.- Secretary of the Interior's Recommendations for National Conservation Systems

Land Designation	Millions of Acres
NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM	
Porcupine National Forest	5.5
Yukon-Kuskokwim National Forest	7.3
Wrangell Mountains National Forest	5.5
Chugach National Forest (Additions)	0.5
	18.8
NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM	
Gates of the Arctic National Park	8.36
Kobuk Valley National Monument	1.85
Cape Krusenstern National Monument	.35
Aniakchak Caldera National Monument	.44
Katmai National Park	1.87
Harding Icefield-Kenai Fjords National Monument	.30
Lake Clark National Park	2.61
Mt. McKinley National Park	3.18
Wrangell-St. Elias National Park	8.64
Yukon-Charley National Rivers	1.97
Chukchi-Imuruk National Reserve	2.69
	32.26
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM	
Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge	3.60
Arctic National Wildlife Range (Additions)	3.76
Koyukuk National Wildlife Refuge	4.43
Selawik National Wildlife Refuge	1.40
Alaska Coastal National Wildlife Refuges	.07
Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge (Additions)	5.16
Togiak National Wildlife Refuge	2.74
Noatak National Arctic Range	7.59
Iliamna National Resource Range	2.85
	31.60

WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS	Linear Miles	
Unalakleet National Wild River	60	0.10
Beaver Creek National Wild River	135	0.20
Birch Creek National Wild River	135	0.20
Fortymile National Wild and Scenic River	375	0.32
	705	0.82
Within other proposed units (16)	1,900	
Total		83.48

There are possibilities for production of oil and gas in the Yukon Flats Basin and some mineral potential for gold, tin, and lead in the north portion. Very sparsely settled, it is important as a major waterfowl breeding area, with upland wildlife, big game, and important fisheries. The area would receive careful resource development and management, with wetlands given special consideration to protect waterfowl nesting, and the upper Porcupine and the Sheenjek Rivers maintained in primitive, free-flowing condition as components of Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

Yukon-Kuskokwim National Forest. 7.3 million acres spanning the Middle Yukon and Kuskokwim River Valleys in Central Alaska. It is more than three-fourths forested, with commercial timber estimated to be as much as 2 billion board feet, capable of supporting a major forest products industry. Eight Native villages in the area rely upon its fish and wildlife for subsistence hunting, fishing and trapping. Wildlife include major game species and some of the finest furbearers, plus substantial fisheries. There is little known mineral potential. Historical and archeological sites would be protected and a coordinated management program with the State and the Native peoples would be developed to help the renewable wildlife resources thrive. There are substantial opportunities for public hunting, fishing, and other recreation that is oriented to the rivers and scenic values. The area would be managed under a comprehensive multiple use plan following thorough analysis and public discussion.

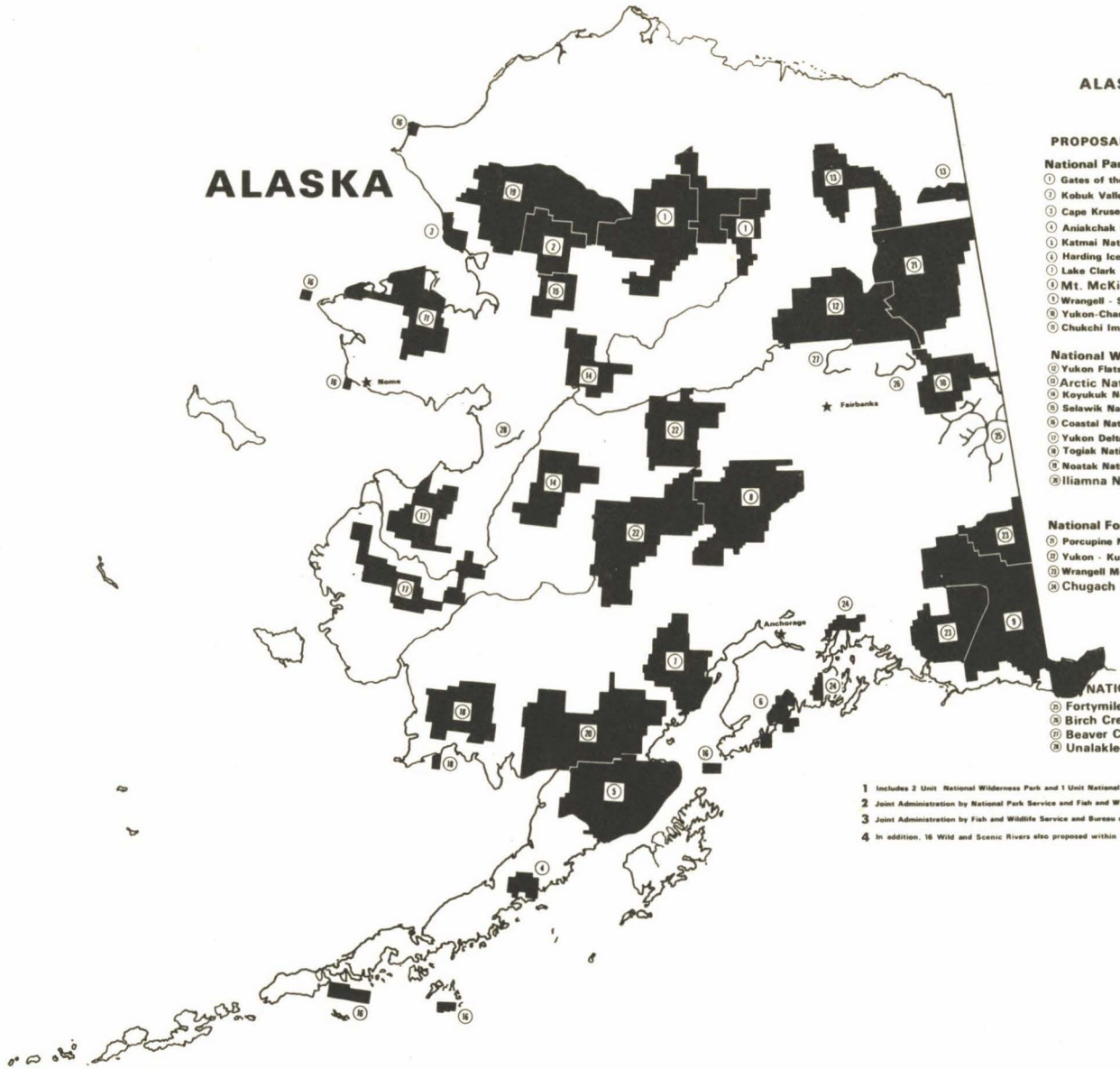
Wrangell Mountains National Forest. This 5.5-million-acre area is in two units flanking the larger Wrangell-St. Elias National Park in southcentral Alaska. It has a variety of outstanding resources that suggest a need for multiple-use management, including minerals, recreation, fish and wildlife, and outstanding scenery. It contains deposits of copper and associated minerals which some experts consider highly significant. Its fish and wildlife, especially Dall sheep, are renowned, and its relative ease of access makes it attractive to backpackers, hunters, fishermen, and sightseers. The variety in the area means recreationists could choose a wide range of opportunities from roadside sightseeing to pure wilderness experience. The present population of about 5,000 in the surrounding region depends heavily on tourism, transportation, and food processing.

Additions to Chugach National Forest. Two isolated areas adjoining the present Chugach National Forest are proposed for inclusion within its boundaries--the 161,000-acre College Fjord (an icy and mountainous region of heavy precipitation in Prince William Sound) and the glacial, rocky Sargent Ice Field or Nellie Juan Unit of 276,000 acres on the Kenai Peninsula northeast of Seward. They will be managed as part of the Chugach National Forest for scenic enjoyment, recreation, wilderness and minor hunting and fishing opportunities.

Draft Environmental Statements have been filed by the Department of the Interior on each of the proposed units in Alaska.

Future Action

The Congress now has 5 years to act on the recommendations made by the Secretary of the Interior. All national conservation system withdrawals which do not receive Congressional classification will revert to public domain on December 18, 1978.



PROPOSALS

AUTHORIZED BY
ALASKA NATIVE CLAIMS SETTLEMENT ACT
P.L. 92-203
December 18,1973

PROPOSAL NAME	MILLIONS OF ACRES
National Park System	
(1) Gates of the Arctic National Park	8.36
(2) Kobuk Valley National Monument	1.85
(3) Cape Krusenstern National Monument	0.35
(4) Aniakchak Caldera National Monument	0.44
(5) Katmai National Park	1.87
(6) Harding Icefield - Kenai Fjords National Monument 2	0.30
(7) Lake Clark National Park	2.61
(8) Mt. McKinley National Park Additions	3.18
(9) Wrangell - St. Elias National Park	8.64
(10) Yukon-Charley National Rivers	1.97
(11) Chukchi Imuruk National Reserve 2	2.69
Sub Total	32.26
National Wildlife Refuge System	
(12) Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge	3.59
(13) Arctic National Wildlife Refuge Additions	3.76
(14) Koyukuk National Wildlife Refuge	4.43
(15) Selawik National Wildlife Refuge	1.40
(16) Coastal National Wildlife Refuge	0.07
(17) Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge	5.16
(18) Togiak National Wildlife Refuge	2.74
(19) Noatak National Arctic Range 3	7.59
(20) Iliamna National Resource Range 3	2.85
Sub Total	31.59
National Forest System	
(21) Porcupine National Forest	5.50
(22) Yukon - Kuskokwim National Forest	7.30
(23) Wrangell Mountain National Forest	5.50
(24) Chugach National Forest Additions	0.50
Sub Total	18.80
NATIONAL WILD AND SCENIC RIVER SYSTEM 4	
(25) Fortymile National Wild and Scenic River	0.32
(26) Birch Creek National Wild River	0.20
(27) Beaver Creek National Wild River	0.20
(28) Unalakleet National Wild River	0.10
Sub Total	0.82
Total	83.47

1 Includes 2 Unit National Wilderness Park and 1 Unit National Wildlands

2 Joint Administration by National Park Service and Fish and Wildlife Service

3 Joint Administration by Fish and Wildlife Service and Bureau of Land Management

4 In addition, 16 Wild and Scenic Rivers also proposed within Parks, Refuges, and Forests.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q: Did the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (P.L. 92-203) specify the classification of lands to be reserved in permanent Federal ownership?

A: Yes. P.L. 92-203 stated that the Secretary of the Interior was to withdraw Alaska lands which he deemed suitable for "addition to or creation as units of the National Park, Forest, Wildlife Refuge, and Wild and Scenic Rivers Systems" and that from these lands he was to recommend to Congress permanent additions to these systems.

Q: What has been the Department of Agriculture's role in formulating the recommendations made by the Secretary of the Interior?

A. The Secretary of Agriculture recognized the responsibility of the Secretary of the Interior to make his recommendations under law and cooperated with and assisted him in meeting the December 18, 1973, deadline.

Q: Now that the Secretary of the Interior has made these recommendations, what happens next?

A: Studies will continue, and the Joint Federal/State Land Use Planning Commission for Alaska and the Congress will hold hearings. Congress must take action before any of the proposals, including those for New National Forests, become a reality.

Q: What is the current Forest Service action?

A: The Forest Service's Alaska Planning Team will continue to operate in Anchorage. It will develop more detailed information on the current recommendations and provide information the Federal/State Land Use Planning Commission and to Congress on multiple use lands in Alaska.

Q: What plans does the Forest Service have for any new National Forests that Congress might designate in Alaska?

A: The Forest Service plans, set forth in the Draft Environmental Statements issued by Interior, call for a 5-year intensive land use planning process involving interdisciplinary skills, cooperation with State, Federal, Native, and local groups and public involvement. During the interim, traditional uses of the land will continue.

Q: Specifically, how would the areas recommended by the Secretary of the Interior for National Forests be administered?

A: The Wrangell Mountains National Forest initially would be administered out of the Area Manager's Office on the Chugach National Forest with resource management personnel stationed at Glennallen or Copper Center. The Porcupine National Forest and the Yukon-Kuskokwim would have resource offices at Fort Yukon and McGrath, respectively. An Area Manager's office would be established in Fairbanks with an interdisciplinary group of permanent employees and several part-time and seasonal employees, to develop and direct land use planning and management.

Q: What are the principal resources in these areas?

A: The Porcupine National Forest contains the eastern end of the Yukon Flats, famous for its waterfowl. It also contains some of the best white spruce forest in interior Alaska. Underlying oil and gas provinces, a broad range of wildlife, scenic rivers and almost unlimited opportunities for dispersed recreation are present. The Yukon-Kuskokwim National Forest has extensive forests providing wildlife habitat, recreation opportunities, a major timber supply and minerals, oil and gas potential. A number of Native villages are dependent on the local resources for their future well-being. The Wrangell Mountains National Forest is accessible by road and offers outstanding recreation opportunities including sport hunting, backpacking and photography. It is a highly mineralized area, home of the original Kennecott Copper mines. It is located adjacent to the newly proposed Wrangell-St. Elias National Park containing some of the most spectacular mountain scenery in Alaska.

Q: What activities take place on National Forest lands that are different than on National Parks or Wildlife Refuges?

A: Hunting, fishing and trapping are permitted on National Forest lands subject to State laws and regulations. In accordance with the general mining laws prospecting and development of mineral resources is permitted. Also, when compatible with other resource values, timber harvesting is permitted on a sustained yield basis to ensure a continuous flow of forest products. National Forest lands may be used, under permit, for special uses when such uses do not interfere with public purposes for which the National Forests were created. Among these special uses are water, gas, oil, telephone and power lines (located to protect scenic values) airstrips, roads and trails.

Q: Does the Forest Service have the necessary skills to manage the diverse resources and interests in the lands proposed for National Forests in Alaska?

A: Yes. The Forest Service is a leader among Federal conservation agencies in the employment of persons with a wide variety of professional skills, including hydrologists, wildlife biologists, landscape architects, soil

scientists, geologists, archeologists, engineers, and, of course, foresters. This highly skilled work force uses careful and thorough environmental analyses and planning as a part of multiple use management. Complex relationships between soils, geology, topography, and climatic and biologic factors are assessed before any major developments are undertaken. National Forest administrators are backed up by the Nation's largest federal wildland research organization. The Forest Service's Institute of Northern Forestry at Fairbanks, Alaska, is a part of this research organization.

Q: Will the new National Forest areas contain designated Wilderness?

A: The proposed legislation does not create any new Wilderness areas in the National Forest proposals. The Forest Service as part of its multiple use planning process will consider wilderness studies along with other resource alternatives. Wilderness Study areas may be designated but no prior commitment is made to Wilderness since only Congress has the authority to designate Wildernesses.

Q: Will designation of new National Forests especially help support the Native (Indian, Eskimo, and Aleut) populations of Alaska?

A: Yes. Natives in villages in close proximity to National Forests would be able to obtain house logs, fuel wood, and other forest products under free-use permits. Hunting for subsistence would continue under regulations of the Alaska Fish and Game Department. The Forest Service can work with the Natives to develop small local sawmills and guide services for the growing tourism services in Alaska. Opportunities for employment in the various land management fields on the Forests would be possible for qualified Native people. The Forest Service can also provide seasonal employment on fire crews, trail crews, and the like. The possibility of mineral development and oil and gas leasing on National Forest land offers further opportunities for employment. Improvement of fish and game habitat may provide local employment as well as increase stocks of wildlife and fish.

Q: How will designation of New National Forests in Alaska benefit the Nation?

A: New National Forests in Alaska will provide many benefits to the Nation. For example, they will provide all Americans with opportunities for a wide range of recreational activity--from developed campgrounds, picnic sites, and trails, to wide open spaces for backpacking and hiking. Hunting, fishing and trapping will be permitted on new Alaskan National Forests subject to State laws. Commercial ski areas can be developed where they will enhance recreation opportunities. National Forests can provide minerals. The Forest Service

cooperates with miners in the development of mineral and energy resources when such development is compatible with overall National Forest priorities. National Forests will provide forest products. National Forest timber is managed on a sustained yield basis to ensure a continuous supply of the many forest products needed by all Americans. National Forest management ensures high quality water supplies for fish and wildlife as well as for domestic and industrial use. Through special permits, National Forests in Alaska can be used for such things as trapper cabins; commercial fishing sites; water, gas, oil, telephone and power lines; air-strips; roads and trails; sawmill sites; and pastures and garden plots, provided such uses do not interfere with the public purposes for which the National Forests are created nor are detrimental to the environment. Rare and endangered plants, animals, fish and birds are protected on National Forests. These are some of the many benefits which would be provided to all Americans through multiple use management on New National Forests in Alaska.

Q: <u>The Secretary has recommended 83 million acres of new permanent Federal reserves for Alaska. What will the private and Federal land situation be if these new reserves are established?</u>

A: Alaska, the largest State, has 375 million acres. Presently private holdings are only three percent. Under the Alaska Statehood Act the State is entitled to 103.5 million acres or about 28 percent and the Alaska Natives will receive about 45 million acres, 12 percent. Thus the total State and private holdings will amount to 43 percent. The remaining 57 percent would be retained as federal reserves or open public domain.

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No. 11 NEW WILDERNESS STUDY AREAS. . . . . October 1973
(Supercedes CI Report No. 9)

No. 12 NEW NATIONAL FORESTS FOR ALASKA . . . February 1974

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